

A

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION:

Saturday, April 26. 1712.

Discouraging thus to the Publick, and
of the publick Affairs, being since
my last, appointed its Period, and
a Tax implying a Suppressing of the Thing
itself, Impos'd upon Pamphlets and publick
Papers, I shall adjourn the Conclusion of
this Volume a little longer; and since it is
to be the last, I shall apply the few that re-
main, to some Points, which I had before
resolved to End with, when ever this Time,
which has been long expected, should come
to pass; and these Things are,

1. Stating the Case of the *Dissenters*,
their Interest and present Business, as

it relates to the Affair of *Occasional Conformity*, Places, Party, &c. And a
Word or two of what they may yet
do to retrieve their Circumstances.
2. Something relating to Peace, and a
Ballance of Parties among us, which
seems to me, to be the only remaining
Way to prevent the Nation's Ruin.
3. A brief Word or two, relating to
Scotland, and then take my leave with
a short Defence of this Work, and
something about myself.

I begin with the State of the *Dissenter's*
Case, as it respects the late *Occasional Bill*;
I have

said as much, relating to the late Abandoning them by their Party-Friends, as can be said; the Gentlemen that did it, I am persuaded, have look'd back on it with Regret, being neither able to Account for the Morality or Policy of it, nor so clear in the Necessity of it, as they were at first, tho' neither could that Necessity be justified, had it been as great as was pretended, otherwise than it justifies doing *Evil that Good may come*; which Necessity, had it been a Plea, is much more so to others, for making use of Instruments and Hands, which they never design'd to make use of; but of these Melancholy Things enough has been said, especially considering it is *post factum*, and there is no recalling the Works of Yesterday, or the Time that is past.

The Enquiry that seems most Rational, is, *What follows?* Are the *Dissenters* then Ruin'd? Are they a lost People? Is their Case desperate? Are they to be Oppress'd and Suppress'd by this Act? *No, no, far otherwise*, and this is my present Subject, viz. That the *Dissenters* have now an Occasion put into their Hands, even put into their Hands by their Enemies, to restore their Character, to retrieve their Circumstances, and turn all the Mischiefs design'd them in this Law, to their real Advantage, as a Body—— Now do I question, but if God, who alone brings *Meat out of the Eater, and Good out of Evil*, will be pleas'd to opon the Eyes of the *Dissenters*, as I hope he will, to their present Duty and Interest, all the Advantage promised by their Enemies to themselves, and all the Evil to the *Dissenters*, as the Result of this Bill, shall turn to the Establishing the Interest of the *Dissenters*, rendering them more Considerable, more Formidable, and give them a greater Weight in the Nation, than ever they had before.

It is long since I foretold, that the *Oceanic Conformity* of the *Dissenters* would be

their Ruin; and many Years ago, I bore my Testimony against the Practice, which I never yet saw Cause to Recant; and I am not able to be sorry, that an entire Stop is now put to it—— Let none mistake me, I am far from Justifying or Approving the Method by which it is done, the Principle from which, or Design for which it is done, all which I esteem Unwarrantable; as to the Legislative Part, I have nothing to do with that, but I think the Plot laid far out of the House, and the Authors to have acted against Civil Right, against Constitution, Liberty, against Capitulated Privileges, and against every Thing that is Just and Honourable.

I own, the Law is a Blow to the *Dissenting Interest*, and such a Blow, as in one Sense, can never be Retriev'd; but I say, I believe it is yet in the Power of the *Dissenters*, and I hope in the Meaning of Providence, that it should another Way abundantly recompense them, and make up for all the rest of the Disaster, by Establishing both their Religious and Civil Interest in the World; and this is what I am to explain myself upon.

If the Eyes of the *Dissenters* may so far be open'd to their own Advantages, as to prevail upon them to take Right Measures on this nice Occasion, I repeat it again, all these Things shall turn to their Establishment, their Enemies shall be entirely disappointed, it shall reconcile them to the Charity of all the Reasonable and Christian Part of the Church of *England*; it shall clear up their Sincerity, vindicate them from the Scandals cast on them by those, who for Politick Ends, rather than visible Crime, have Black'ned and Asperfed them, and in short, it shall Form the true Interest of the *Dissenters* in this Nation, in a manner never to be broken; and this I shall endeavour to make out in as few Words as possible, the Life of my Work being near it's Conclusion.

MISCELLANEA.

I Mention'd above, the Suppressing of the Printing this and other Papers, by the New Act now depending in the House of Commons, and I am Reprov'd by a by-stander, who says, No, the Tax upon Newspapers and Pamphlets is nothing, but the People will easily come up to the Price, the Papers will sell as before, and a great Summ of Money will be Levy'd by it.

This Notion has caus'd me to speak to it, because I find many People of that Opinion, and I would fain undeceive every body, if I could —— There is not an Author in this Town, who acquiesces more willingly than I, in a real View of having an Universal Stop put to the Paper-War in this Nation, which I really think is become a National Grievance, a Breach of Common Charity, a Subject of continu'd Strife; and would the rest have Agreed to it, I have often offer'd to lay down, tho' at the same Time, I believe I am in as capable a Posture to support my Paper by the Assistance of Friends, tho' with the Tax upon it, as any in this Town; but that by the Way.

But what I am now upon, is to undeceive those Gentlemen who are mistaken in their Notions, as above, and run away with the Belief;

1. That it will not Suppress the Printing, &c.
2. That it will raise a great deal of Money.

I am not to Enquire what Provisions and Exceptions the Parliament shall think fit to make, when they come to the several Readings of the Bill —— But I shall Argue upon the General Scheme as laid down in the Votes, and shall Discourse of it only as it relates to Trade.

That Desires of every Thing lessens

the Consumption, is a Maxim in Trade no Man can deny; but there are some Things which are so Diminutive in their Nature, that they spread meerly upon the Qualification of being Trifles — Such are the innumerable little Printed Tracts spread over this Nation, from the Ballad and Primer, to the Pamphlet of Six-pence — These are Sold so low, that nothing can be imagin'd lower in all North-Britain; the Newspapers sell in the Street but at a half-penny, and Pamphlet Six-Sheets for Six-pence, Four for Four-pence, and the like.

When these come to be Tax'd, when the half Sheets come to be 2 d. in England and Three half-pence in Scotland; Pamphlets 3 d. per Sheet in Scotland and 4 d. in England, Will they be sold? Let any Man judge of it by the Stamp upon Almanacks laid last Year, and let them Examin, if a Printer in Scotland having Printed 500 Almanacks there, with the Stamps, did not Return 495 of the Stamps, and lose all the Paper and Labour; let the Stationer's Company be Enquir'd of; 1. If they did not print three fourth parts less in Number of Almanacks last Year than they used to sell, and yet 2. If they have not sixty Thousand left on their Hands, the Stamps of which are to be return'd to the Government; indeed the Printer at Newcastle found out a Way to cure it, which was to bid the Government Defiance, and Print them without a Stamp, and laugh at them into the Bargain: There can be no doubt, but if Papers for Sale are to be Stamp'd, those which cannot be sold must be Return'd, if not, no Printer or Author, or Proprietor, can so much as Attempt the Sale, for even his little penny or half-penny Paper is to be return'd to him if not sold, and if the Stamp cannot be return'd, he cannot so much as try whether they will sell or no.

If, on the other Hand, they are allow'd to be Return'd, then all the Papers in Town will be only read and Return'd, for the sake of the Stamp, which when the rest is become waste Paper, will certain its Value

— Let them find out a Medium for this that can.

These Difficulties make it out of doubt, that this Tax will suppress the Papers and Pamphlets; for my part, I make no question, but the Parliament do it with that View, and I think the Design most just and most necessary; the greatest Objection I make to it is, That it will immediately divest a great many Families of their Bread, who now get Livelihoods from these Things, viz. By the Working and Making the Paper, by the Printing, &c. As to the Writers, let them go, I am not of those who think them worth Naming; and also the Sellers of those Baubles are a vast Number,

and really, as Trade in general is under great Decays and Discouragements, it is Melancholly to think of the Poor having any of their little helps to live, taken from them.

The Case of the Paper-Makers in England is particularly hard, because they are the only Makers of the Sorts of Paper us'd in these Things; and, as they say, the Tax upon Paper first loads their Labour, and now the Stop put upon Printing takes away their Market, so that most of the Paper-Mills in England must give over.

These are the sad Necessities of a Time of a War, and People in Trade have no Remedy, but to Condole with one another:

— In my next, I shall undeceive you about the Probability of this Affair, Raising a great Summ of Money, as some imagin — And speak to some Difficulties and Hardships also in the Tax itself.

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